

# Working With Women



**Promoting Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR)  
for Business Success in Bangladesh's Garments Industry**



Kingdom of the Netherlands

**SNV**

Netherlands  
Development  
Organisation



## GARMENT SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is the world's third largest garment producer. An estimated 3,000+

factories currently employ some 4 million workers and 85% of them are women. Annual export revenues stand at USD 17.9 billion and are projected to treble by 2020, spawning millions of formal sector jobs.

Today the rights of factory workers are very much under the spotlight, particularly in the wake of the Rana Plaza factory disaster. Activists, politicians and development practitioners are calling for the global fashion industry to ensure its Bangladeshi suppliers enforce stricter regulations to improve working conditions.

In the urgency to provide greater protection for workers the needs and concerns of the garment businesses are overlooked. Yet these businesses hold the key to successful transformation within the industry.

The question is: How can substantive improvements in the working conditions of the predominantly female workforce be achieved in a manner which strengthens what is arguably Bangladesh's most important industry, and its prospects for long-term, sustainable growth?

## SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The industry is the single largest source of employment for 14-35 year old women, largely migrants from rural areas and from disadvantaged backgrounds. Health issues including malnutrition, communicable diseases, pregnancy complications, incorrect use of family planning materials, reproductive infections and diseases undermine the productivity of the RMG industry. Women report missing up to 4-6 days work a month because of reproductive health issues.

Most workers do not know the importance of sexual reproductive health or that they have a right to access health services. Most factories lack trained medical and nursing staff and many workers do not know where to seek services, or cannot access them due to long working hours and home commitments and/or financial constraints.

A number of donors and development organisations have launched Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) programmes that focus on awareness and education through direct engagement with factory workers. They have had some positive results, but have struggled to gain significant traction because they have not fully engaged with the garment business community or recognised their business needs.

By tapping into the growing market for environmentally sustainable and socially responsible products and services – turn the current threat to the industry into an opportunity for putting in place the necessary foundations for long-term industry growth. The company can showcase its responsible practices in its marketing to help drive profits.

## PROJECT BRIEFING

The bottom line for Inclusive Business initiatives is that they are commercially viable. Inclusive Business (IB) refers to building profitable business activities that also tangibly expand opportunities for the poor and disadvantaged. SNV proposes a series of coordinated interventions which will harness market mechanisms to deliver win-win solutions for business and the (predominantly female) workforce, by promoting, incentivising, supporting and rewarding the adoption of responsible and inclusive business practices within Bangladesh's garment industry, with a particular emphasis SRHR and Health & Safety issues, reflecting both the composition of the workforce and the key issues of concern in the RMG industry.

Inclusive businesses engage the poor as employees, suppliers, distributors or consumers to accelerate growth. An IB-based approach can realise productivity gains, while also tapping into the growing market for environmentally sustainable and socially responsible products and services. This approach provides new ways of achieving what are typical business objectives, making it a sustainable solution since it generates commitment and ownership.

# TEN FACTORIES TO PILOT THE PROJECT:

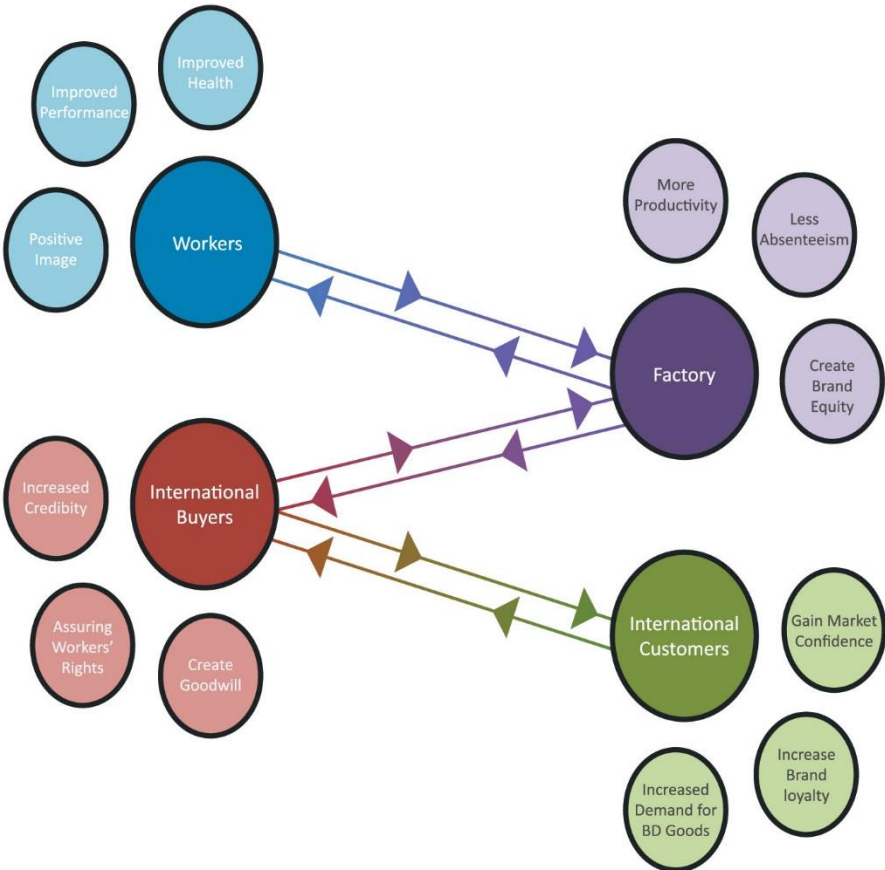
## INSPIRE CHANGE

The approach aims at shifting away from traditional awareness and capacity building programmes targeted only at workers. It engages directly with the garment businesses, so they can realise the returns of addressing SRHR issues within their factories.

## PROMOTING INCLUSIVE BUSINESS THROUGH SRHR

To create this systemic change, SNV will work with 10 factories and selected SRHR service providers to pilot IB business cases. The project will work with industry stakeholders to promote and support the adoption of responsible business 'best practices' throughout their operations. Longer term success will be dependent on factories becoming champions and disseminating their results to other factories.

### Invisible Cycle in the Zigzag: Correlation between Actors in Garments Industry





# SNV Philosophy: Smart Development Works

## ABOUT US

SNV is a not-for-profit international development organisation founded in the Netherlands nearly 50 years ago.

We have built a long-term, local presence in 38 of the poorest countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Our global team of local and international advisors work with local partners to equip communities, businesses and organisations with the tools, knowledge and connections they need to increase their incomes and gain access to basic services-empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and guide their own development. Our experience includes Inclusive Businesses with companies and Base of the Pyramid communities involved as suppliers, employees, distributors and consumers.

Profound and long-lasting change require motivated stakeholders and decision-makers.



"Creating Champions"  
Fostering change in  
local garment business  
towards responsible  
business practices.

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